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ABSTRACT

The employment histories of young persons were examined using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, which provides a nearly complete work history on all jobs held and weeks worked over a 12-year period, 1978-1990. The data provided information on a sample of young men and women aged 14-22 in 1979 who have been interviewed yearly since then. Some of the results of the study were the following: (1) by age 29, a typical worker has held 7.6 jobs and worked 434 weeks since age 18, an average of 36.2 weeks per year; (2) there are significant differences in the number of jobs held and weeks worked by sex and race; (3) at each age, Whites average more jobs than Hispanics and Hispanics more than Blacks; (4) White females average more jobs than Hispanics and Blacks in their younger years, but by age 29, Black women surpass Hispanic women in the average number of jobs held; (5) in their early ages, males and females are similar in weeks worked, but by age 29, men have on average about 90 more weeks of work experience since age 18 than do women. (KC)

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Work and Family: Jobs Held and Weeks Worked by Young Adults

Data from the National Longitudinal Surveys

U.S. Department of Labor
Bureau of Labor Statistics

Report 827
August 1992

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This issue of *Work and Family* examines the employment histories of young persons. It draws upon data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth which provides a nearly complete work history on all jobs held and weeks worked over a 12-year period, 1978 to 1990. By age 29, a typical young worker has held 7.6 jobs and worked 434 weeks since age 18, an average of 36.2 weeks per year. There are significant differences in the number of jobs held and weeks worked by sex and race.

Overview

Individuals have a great deal of job mobility during their early years in the labor market. Brief and transitory periods of employment are common for young workers. As they age, employment tends to stabilize, and the probability that a worker leaves or loses a job eventually declines.

Young workers change jobs and employment status for a variety of reasons. Young entrants into the workforce often need time to test out their career interests through experience in a work setting, and they may sometimes decide to return to school for further education. Information about the quality of a job match reveals itself with time. Those who are well matched remain on the job, and poor matches will more likely end. In addition, workers often receive on-the-job training at a particular job, which often makes workers more valuable to the employer providing the training. This training may reduce the probability of a job separation, because a trained employee might be less likely to quit and an employer might be less likely to fire a trained person. Information about jobs is often costly and difficult to acquire, thus workers often accept the first job offers that come along and stay in jobs only until they receive a better offer.

This report presents information on the cumulative number of jobs and weeks of work for young workers using data from the Youth cohort of the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS). These data describe a sample of young men and women who were between the ages of 14 and 22 in 1979 and who have been interviewed annually since that year. A key feature of this survey is that it collects information in an event history format, in which dates are collected for the beginning and ending of important events. In the case of work, the starting date for every job is recorded, and if a person stops work for that employer, the ending date is recorded as well.[1] For multiple jobholders, information is gathered for each job, with starting and ending dates. Periods of nonwork within a job, such as periods on layoff, or when ill, pregnant, and so forth are also recorded. By recording the dates of all jobs and all periods of nonwork, the survey provides a nearly complete and continuous employment history for each individual in the sample.

This discussion of young workers gives the average number of jobs held and average weeks of work since age 18. The sample is restricted to those who were age 18 or younger as of January 1, 1978. The time frame analyzed runs from January 1, 1978 to January 1, 1990. Consequently, averages are computed for individuals for ages 18 through 29.

Number of jobs

Previous research suggests that individuals experience a number of employment transitions during their initial years in the labor market. One estimate claims that two-thirds of the total number of job changes occur in the first 10 years of an individual's career.[2] Research also indicates only 1 out of 20 male workers remains at his first job over a 10-year period.[3]

Table 1 reports the average cumulative number of jobs held since age 18. By age 18, individuals have held 1.6 jobs on average. Eleven years later, at age 29, they average 7.6 jobs. Between the ages of 18 and 29, the average number of new jobs per year ranges from 0.4 to 0.7, with the greater numbers occurring for the most part at the younger ages.

[1] A job is defined as a period of work with a particular employer. For self-employed workers, each "new" job is defined by the individuals themselves.

[2] See Robert E. Hall, "The Importance of Lifetime Jobs in the U.S. Economy," *American Economic Review*, Vol. 72, No. 4, 1982, pp. 716-24.

[3] See Robert H. Topel and Michael R. Ward, "Job Mobility and the Careers of Young Men," National Bureau of Economic Research working paper No. 2649, July 1988.

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Table 1. Number of jobs held since age 18, January 1, 1978 to January 1, 1990

	Age											
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
Total	1.6	2.3	3.0	3.7	4.3	4.9	5.4	5.9	6.3	6.7	7.1	7.6
White	1.7	2.4	3.1	3.8	4.4	5.0	5.6	6.0	6.5	6.9	7.2	7.7
Black	1.1	1.7	2.3	2.8	3.4	3.9	4.4	4.8	5.1	5.5	5.7	6.5
Hispanic	1.4	2.1	2.7	3.3	3.9	4.5	5.0	5.5	6.0	6.4	6.7	7.6
Men	1.6	2.4	3.1	3.8	4.4	5.1	5.6	6.1	6.6	7.0	7.5	8.0
White	1.7	2.5	3.2	3.9	4.5	5.1	5.7	6.2	6.6	7.1	7.6	8.1
Black	1.2	1.9	2.5	3.1	3.9	4.5	5.2	5.7	6.0	6.2	6.7	7.6
Hispanic	1.4	2.1	2.8	3.5	4.1	4.8	5.4	5.9	6.4	6.8	7.3	8.0
Women	1.5	2.2	2.9	3.5	4.1	4.7	5.2	5.6	6.0	6.4	6.7	7.2
White	1.6	2.4	3.0	3.7	4.4	4.9	5.4	5.9	6.3	6.7	6.9	7.5
Black	1.0	1.6	2.2	2.7	3.2	3.7	4.2	4.6	4.9	5.3	5.7	6.2
Hispanic	1.3	1.9	2.4	2.9	3.4	3.8	4.2	4.5	4.8	5.2	5.4	5.7

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth

Table 1 also displays the average number of jobs held since age 18 by sex. At age 18, men and women average nearly the same number of jobs, 1.6 for men and 1.5 for women. The difference by gender, however, increases with age. By age 29, men have held an average of 8 jobs, whereas women typically have held 7.2 jobs.

The average number of jobs held since age 18 by race and ethnicity also appears in table 1. At each age, whites average more jobs than Hispanics, and Hispanics more than blacks. Yet, by age 29, whites and Hispanics average nearly the same number of jobs.

Among men, the differences by race and ethnic origin resemble those found among all individuals, in that at most ages, whites average more jobs than Hispanics, and Hispanics average more jobs than blacks. By age 29, however, white and Hispanic males both average approximately 8 jobs, whereas black men average 7.6.

The pattern by race and ethnicity differs somewhat for women. Similar to their male counterparts, white females average more jobs than Hispanic and black women at all ages. Hispanic women average more jobs than black women in the first few years after age 18. By age 24, however, Hispanics and blacks average the same number of jobs, and after age 24, black women surpass Hispanic women in the averge number of jobs held.

Weeks worked

An individual's work experience is a commonly desired variable in labor market analyses. Unfortunately, most data series contain little information on labor market history, and work experience is roughly approximated by using an individual's age and education. Individuals may undergo transitions into and out of the labor market, due to decisions relating to schooling, marital status, childbearing, or other factors. As a result, individuals may vary substantially in their actual work experience.

The detailed labor market histories contained in the NLS Youth cohort allow for precise determination of total weeks worked. Table 2 provides data on the average number of weeks worked since age 18. At that age individuals have worked 29.8 weeks on average, and by age 29, the average increases to 433.6 weeks. The change in the average number of weeks worked at each age steadily increases until age 26, at which it stabilizes at nearly 40 weeks per year.

Table 2 shows the average number of weeks worked since age 18 by sex. The data indicate that males and females are fairly similar in total weeks worked at early ages; however, in their later 20's men start to average significantly more weeks of work than women. By age 29, men have on average about 90 more weeks of work experience since age 18 than do women.

Table 2 also gives the cumulative number of weeks worked by race and ethnicity. At each age, whites average more weeks than Hispanics, and Hispanics more than blacks. These differences increase with age. In particular, the difference between whites and the other two groups is much greater at age 29 than at age 18.

For men, whites average more weeks of work at each age than blacks or Hispanics. Blacks and Hispanics have very similar amounts of work experience at each age. Among women, whites also average more weeks of work than blacks and Hispanics. The pattern of work experience is fairly similar among black and Hispanic women, although Hispanic women do have slightly more work experience at each age.

Table 2. Number of weeks worked since age 18, January 1, 1978 to January 1, 1990

	Age											
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
Total	29.8	60.9	93.1	126.5	161.6	199.1	236.7	274.8	315.5	353.3	392.1	433.6
White	31.7	64.3	98.0	132.7	169.2	208.1	246.9	286.1	328.3	367.5	408.2	451.1
Black	19.3	41.4	65.8	91.9	119.9	149.8	180.1	212.9	247.1	275.7	299.9	333.8
Hispanic	25.2	52.0	80.5	110.6	141.4	175.2	209.3	243.2	277.5	312.2	347.3	381.3
Men	30.9	62.5	95.5	130.1	166.6	206.1	246.6	289.1	335.8	376.8	424.3	479.2
White	32.4	65.3	99.4	134.9	172.6	213.2	254.9	299.2	345.9	390.2	438.0	496.3
Black	23.7	48.6	77.2	107.0	141.7	176.2	212.6	245.9	280.0	314.8	359.9	408.6
Hispanic	25.5	52.4	81.0	111.8	143.5	178.9	214.6	248.7	286.4	323.6	367.7	403.7
Women	28.7	59.2	90.7	122.9	156.5	192.0	226.5	260.2	296.9	329.9	360.7	390.0
White	30.9	63.4	96.6	130.4	165.7	202.8	238.7	272.8	310.5	344.6	378.5	407.2
Black	18.3	39.6	62.9	88.1	114.4	143.1	173.0	204.0	238.6	265.9	285.8	317.5
Hispanic	24.4	51.1	79.1	107.2	135.8	165.2	194.7	226.0	253.8	282.7	297.1	330.1

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth

Technical Note

Data in this report are from the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS), which are sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Bureau contracts with the Center For Human Resource Research of the Ohio State University to manage the surveys and provide user services. The NLS were begun in the mid-1960's with the drawing of four samples: Young Men who were 14-24 years old in 1966, Young Women who were 14-24 years old in 1968, Older Men who were 45-59 years old in 1966, and Mature Women who were 30-44 years old in 1967. Each sample originally had about 5,000 individuals with oversamples of blacks. In the early 1980's, the Young Men and Older Men surveys were discontinued. The two women's surveys continue and are currently collected every 2 years.

In 1979, a new cohort was begun with a sample of over 12,000 young men and women who were 14-21 years of age in 1979. It included oversamples of blacks, Hispanics, economically disadvantaged whites, and youth in the military. The military oversample was discontinued after the 1984 survey, and the economically disadvantaged white oversample was discontinued in 1990. This survey is called the Youth cohort, and the cohort members have been interviewed every year since it began.

The data in this report are weighted so that the sample is representative of the age group studied. The military oversample is not included in the computations, even for the years in which it is available. All inferences that are discussed in the text are statistically significant at the 95-percent confidence level. Due to sampling variability, small differences between estimates that are not discussed in the text should be interpreted with caution. For a detailed explanation of the NLS, see *NLS Handbook 1992* (Center for Human Resource Research, Ohio State University). For information about the NLS, or to be placed on a mailing list, write to National Longitudinal Surveys, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Research and Evaluation, Room 2126, Washington, DC 20212, or call (202) 523-1347.

Information in this report will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: (202) 606-STAT; TDD phone: (202) 606-5897; TDD message referral phone: 1-800-326-2577.